OVERLOOKED (Part Two) Foundation Support for Native American Leaders and Communities

Nawayee (Center School) Mosaic Mural, Minneapolis Photograph courtesy of Karen McCall

> THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY

OVERLOOKED (PART 2): FOUNDATION SUPPORT FOR NATIVE AMERICAN LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

Recent years have seen increased attention from philanthropic leaders to questions about race, systemic racism, and systemic inequities.¹ This increased attention was heightened by the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequities and the national protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by police. Since early 2020, some foundations have made greater efforts to address systemic inequities by increasing their funding to nonprofits serving communities of color. More than 40 percent of foundations report increasing their funding to nonprofits serving Black communities, and a little more than a quarter report doing so for nonprofits serving Latino communities.² However, other communities affected by systemic inequities, including Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Native American communities, appear to have been overlooked. These communities have not received much increased support from foundations during the same period.³

Across four research studies the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) has conducted in the past two years, we've noticed two concerning trends emerge for AAPI and Native American nonprofit leaders and communities (trends that we do not see for nonprofit leaders and communities):

- 1. AAPI and Native American nonprofit leaders report having less positive experiences with their foundation funders than nonprofit leaders of other races/ethnicities. This has been the case during, as well as prior to, the pandemic.
- 2. Despite the significant challenges facing AAPI and Native American people, most foundations continue to overlook nonprofits that serve these communities.

We are sharing these results in a two-part series. The first report in the series focuses on findings about AAPI communities and leaders. This second report focuses on findings about Native American communities and leaders. Both reports include stories of nonprofit leaders from these communities, in their own words.

Finding 1

Native American nonprofit leaders report having less positive experiences with their foundation funders than nonprofit leaders of other races/ethnicities. This has been the case during, as well as prior to, the pandemic.

In data spanning the last decade, Native American leaders have rated their foundation funders lower than nonprofit leaders of other races/ethnicities on the strength of the funder-grantee relationship, funders' understanding of their organizations and the contexts in which they operate, and funders' impact on their fields.⁴

DIMENSIONS ON WHICH NATIVE AMERICAN NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS RATE THEIR FOUNDATION FUNDERS LOWER

The strength of their relationships with their foundation funders



Their foundation funders' understanding of their organizations and the contexts in which they operate

Their foundation funders' impact on their fields

These two dimensions — relationships and understanding — are interconnected. The biggest predictor of strong foundation-grantee relationships is foundations' understanding of grantees' organizations and the contexts in which they operate.⁵ Additionally, strong foundation-grantee relationships are crucial for achieving shared goals and making an impact.⁶

In interviews with Native American nonprofit leaders, these connections were very apparent as they recounted their experiences with foundations. "If you don't understand the issue that you're trying to impact, you're not going to have very much impact," said one leader. Recalling a time when they had a positive relationship with a foundation funder, another leader said, "The foundation made a positive impact because the relationship was about working together to find a solution to the problem."

These Native American leaders described their strong relationships with foundations as built on trust, honesty, and, as one leader put it, "a sense of respect that I'm the expert in this area."

DATA SOURCE FOR THIS FINDING

Data for this finding come from CEP's Grantee Perception Report[®] (GPR), which is a tool that foundations commission to gather candid comparative feedback from their grantees. When funders commission a GPR, we send confidential online surveys to their grantees and ask them questions about a number of topics, including funder-grantee relationships, funders' understanding of grantees' organizations and the contexts in which they work, and grantees' perceptions of funders' impact.

Through the GPR, from 2011 to 2021, CEP collected responses from almost 17,000 executive directors (EDs) of nonprofits that receive funding from more than 250 U.S.-based foundations. Two percent of the executive directors in our GPR data set are Native American. (For more information about this data set, please see the Methodology section of this report.) Another leader said their most positive experiences came when the foundation engaged deeply with their organization and its work. "We listen to each other, and we exchange ideas."

Yet Native American nonprofit leaders we interviewed also described difficult and damaging experiences when building relationships with foundations. They recounted interactions characterized by a lack of understanding of their communities and the challenges they face. "We submitted a proposal to a local foundation, and we never heard anything back from them," said one

leader. "Word filtered back to me that they did not understand the proposal at all. It wasn't parallel to what their approach would be, so they really didn't give us a read or a listen. They didn't really get what we were doing or why we were doing it that way. We couldn't even get a meeting with them to talk about it."

Another leader described foundations as wanting "bang for their buck," prioritizing the number of children helped. This prioritization indicated a lack of understanding for how complex it is to meet the many needs of the children their organization serves. "We have kids who are dealing with drug-addicted relatives. Affected by prostitution and extreme poverty. Don't know where they're going to be sleeping tomorrow. Don't know if they're going to get kicked out of their home tomorrow or get evicted. Don't have regular meals or running water."

While leaders want foundations to understand the challenges their communities are facing, they also want foundations to see their strengths. "Be able to see not only the burdens and disparities in our communities, but also the strength and wisdom of who we are as Native people," said one such leader.

Native American nonprofit leaders provided many pieces of advice for how foundations can build stronger relationships with them and develop a better understanding of their organizations and the contexts in which they work. Leaders suggest that funders spend time in their communities and take the time to understand and learn about the history and issues facing Native communities. They also suggest greater responsiveness and more long-term, flexible funding from foundations.

WHAT IS A STRONG FUNDER-GRANTEE RELATIONSHIP?

According to CEP's research, strong foundation-grantee relationships have five components.⁷ In strong relationships, nonprofits:

- Feel they have been treated fairly by the foundation.
- Are comfortable approaching the foundation when a problem arises.
- Find the foundation to be responsive.
- Feel that the foundation has clearly communicated about goals and strategies.
- Feel that the foundation is consistent in its communications.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ADVICE FROM NATIVE AMERICAN NONPROFIT LEADERS ON BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

"Visiting the organization would be the top priority. See what we do and how we engage in and impact communities. Participate in community-based events, whether it be at my organization or other organizations within the American Indian community. Take that time out of their schedule to be here, to participate, whether it be a powwow, a family fun night activity, or a language class."

"I would like foundations to come to where we're already meeting. We don't have the staff capacity to always attend their meetings."

"I would suggest that they call more often. They could ask for our advice on issues. Site visits are always something that really helps relationship building."

"When I think about those foundations that we've had great interactions with, it's because they have staff that are American Indian or Alaska Native. When foundations have had these staff, it really does strengthen the relationship and create trust."

"Long-term funding builds good relationships. It makes you feel empowered to do your job well. It makes you feel trusted. It allows us to make meaningful change."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ADVICE FROM NATIVE AMERICAN NONPROFIT LEADERS ON DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

"I want funders to have some background knowledge before they meet with us, because oftentimes the information we're sharing might be out there already. There is an opportunity for foundations to have that homework already done, so when you get into a meeting they're trying to build up their knowledge at a deeper level, not surface-level."

"I feel like I have to educate the foundation staff as to what the reality is. I've had to have that conversation with multiple foundations. It takes a lot of time. At some point I would hope that the foundations would take the time really to educate themselves."

"I think the biggest thing is listening. Not hearing, but listening. Listening to understand. There's a big difference between listening to understand or listening to reply. I think a lot of times in America, people listen to reply. They listen to win. They listen to be right. They don't listen with an open heart about what people are saying. That's a big problem. Listening is a process. It's not just a passive experience of sound vibrating your eardrums. It's taking in what people say and reflecting on it and accepting it as their truth."

"Compensate us for our advice. We have found that we give a lot of free advice, and it's not reciprocal. We have learned to just say, 'Our board of directors does not allow us to provide our expertise unless we're compensated.' That really pisses people off, and it's fascinating. I have to tell myself that Euro-Americans say that to each other all the time and it's okay. Asking for compensation is okay."

Finding 2

Despite the significant challenges facing Native American people, most foundations continue to overlook nonprofits that serve Native American communities.

Over the past two years, Native American communities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Native Americans have been hospitalized and have died from COVID-19 at higher rates than any other racial/ethnic group in the United States.⁸ Between April 2020 and June 2021, one in every 168 Native American children in the United States lost a caregiver due to the pandemic.⁹ These extremely high death rates, especially among community elders, also threaten the progress made in preserving Native languages. Further, these hospitalization and death rates are likely significantly higher than the data show, because many states do not consistently track data on Native Americans.¹⁰ Compounding the healthrelated impacts of COVID-19, tribal governments and Native American economies have been devastated by the pandemic.¹¹

In our interviews with Native American nonprofit leaders whose organizations serve Native American communities, they emphasized the extreme stress that they are under. "When we're onboarding a new person, we tell them that we could work 24 hours, seven days a week, and still have a ton of work to do, so we have to pick out the priorities that we can focus on and let the rest go and try not to cry yourself to sleep every night," said one such leader.

Despite the devastating impacts of the pandemic on Native American communities and the extreme stress that these nonprofit leaders are under, data from foundation leaders and nonprofit leaders alike indicate that since the pandemic began, few foundations have stepped up to support nonprofits that serve Native American communities.

DATA FROM FOUNDATION LEADERS

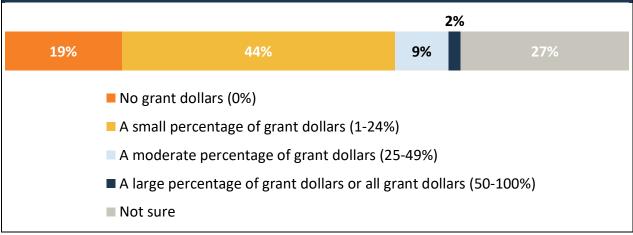
Currently, almost two thirds of foundation leaders say that they provide little or no grant dollars to organizations primarily serving Native American communities. Another quarter are not sure what percentage of their grant dollars are currently allocated to organizations primarily serving these communities (Figure 1).¹² (For more information about the research study for which this data was collected, see *Foundations Respond to Crisis: Lasting Change?*)

Fewer than 20 percent of foundation leaders say that the percentage of grant dollars they are directing to organizations serving Native American communities has increased since the pandemic began.¹³ Native Americans represent a small proportion of the U.S. population (approximately two percent), but the percentage of foundations increasing funding to these

communities still seems low in light of the scale of the historic and present-day challenges they face.¹⁴

FIGURE 1. FOUNDATION LEADERS' REPORTING OF GRANT DOLLARS TO NONPROFITS SERVING NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES*

Percentage of grant dollars going to organizations serving Native American communities (N=256)



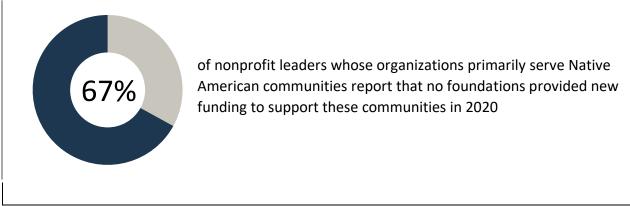
* Self-reported data from foundation leaders in spring 2021 in response to a survey administered by CEP.

DATA FROM NONPROFIT LEADERS

About two thirds of nonprofit leaders whose organizations primarily serve Native American communities report that they did not receive new foundation funding in 2020 (Figure 2).¹⁵ (For more information about the research study for which this data was collected, see <u>Persevering</u> <u>Through Crisis: The State of Nonprofits</u>.)

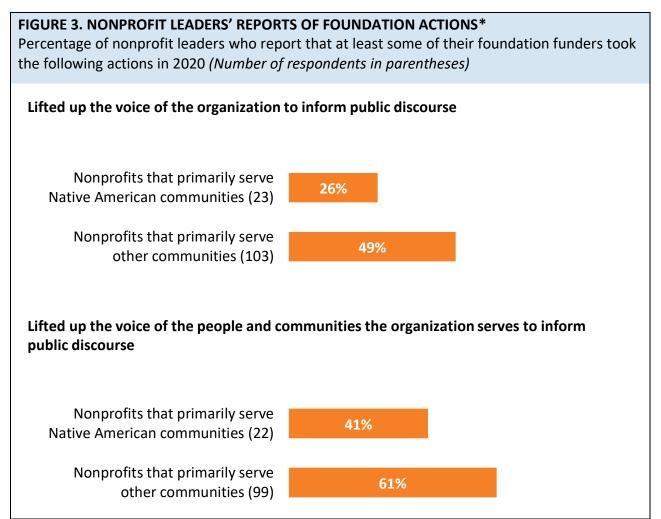
FIGURE 2. NONPROFIT LEADERS' REPORTS OF FOUNDATION SUPPORT FOR NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES*

(N=21 organizations primarily serving Native American communities)



* Self-reported data from nonprofit leaders in February 2021 in response to a survey administered by CEP.

Further, compared to nonprofit leaders whose organizations primarily serve other communities, leaders of nonprofits primarily serving Native American communities also report that in 2020, fewer of their foundation funders elevated the voices of their organizations and the people and communities they serve to inform public discourse. For example, they report that fewer of their foundation funders hosted webinars featuring voices from these communities or promoted content created by these communities, compared to leaders of nonprofits primarily serving other communities (Figure 3).¹⁶



* Self-reported data from nonprofit leaders in spring 2021 in response to a survey administered by CEP.

In interviews with Native American nonprofit leaders whose organizations serve Native American communities, they emphasized how difficult it is to get foundation funding. "We are at the bottom of nearly every socioeconomic indicator, but we're invisible," said one nonprofit leader. "Nothing is changing. We're not even on their radar. I don't know what to do."

Another leader recalled being denied funding because their participants didn't fit into a stereotypical mold of struggling Native people. This leader said, "One time a program officer told us that they couldn't fund us because the participants in our program were successful emerging leaders. We interpreted that as, 'They just want to fund drunk, starving Indians on the reservation or on skid row in the city. They're not interested in what Native American leaders can contribute to the rest of society.'"

Leaders emphasized the need for foundations to support not just their own organizations, but other Native American-led and Native American-serving organizations. "Don't just support one agency and say, 'Oh, I checked off the Indian box,'" said one nonprofit leader. "Fund more of us."

RESOURCES FOR FINDING NONPROFITS SERVING NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

<u>Investing in Native Communities</u>, a joint project of Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid, has a website highlighting work that is taking place in Native communities across the United States:

https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/investments-inaction/

In addition, <u>Guidestar's search tool</u> has a "Populations Served" filter that can be used to identify nonprofits that serve Indigenous peoples. Native American nonprofit leaders shared several misconceptions that foundation staff have about their communities misconceptions that make it harder for them to obtain funding. They described a lack of understanding about the diversity of tribes and stereotypes about their lives and economies.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

NATIVE AMERICAN NONPROFIT LEADERS ON MISCONCEPTIONS THAT FOUNDATIONS HAVE ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITIES

"You can't assume that just because you're meeting with two tribal communities, that they're going to be exactly the same. There are 574 federally recognized tribes. There are unique, beautiful, amazing differences between those tribes."

"I think there's a real lack of understanding about urban American Indians and our population. 70% of us, if not more, are living in the metro area. I don't know if foundations understand that."

"There's so much marginalization of Indigenous people and disinformation. Those are the two biggest problems. Most Americans that I talk to don't know about the history of Indigenous people, don't understand what's happened, don't understand our lives. It means that they are not aware of anything that needs fixing. Then there's the disinformation. 'Indians are drunks or Indians are casino owners. Every Indian gets a free check from the government, and they make millions every year. How come they get a free ride?' That's one big lie that's told over and over again."

"There's an assumption that we would be able to go to the tribes to get the funds we need. That the tribes are flush with funding, which is not the case."

 $\begin{tabular}{l} @ The Center for Effective Philanthropy 2021 \\ 13 \end{tabular} \end{tabular} \end{tabular} \end{tabular} \end{tabular} \end{tabular}$

Conclusion

Despite the heavy toll the pandemic has taken on Native American people since early 2020, few foundations have stepped up their support for Native American communities.

When working with foundations — both before and during the pandemic — Native American nonprofit leaders have reported less positive experiences than leaders of other races/ethnicities. These leaders rate the strength of their relationships with their foundation funders lower, find that their foundation funders have less understanding of their organizations and the contexts in which they operate, and report that their foundation funders have less impact on their fields.

Going forward, the Native American nonprofit leaders we interviewed urge foundations to take actions that will allow them to better support their organizations and communities. They suggest that foundations build stronger relationships based on deep understanding by:

- Doing their homework
- Participating in their organizations' events and meetings
- Conducting site visits
- Being more communicative
- Hiring Native American staff
- Compensating Native American nonprofits for their advice
- Providing flexible, long-term support
- Funding more organizations led by and serving Native Americans

RESOURCES FOR WORKING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH NATIVE AMERICAN LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES

First Nations Development Institute

- <u>Community Foundation Giving to</u> <u>Native American Causes</u>
- <u>Growing Inequity: Large</u>
 <u>Foundation Giving to Native</u>
 <u>American Organizations and</u>
 <u>Causes 2006-2014</u>
- <u>Funder Perspectives: From a</u> <u>Baseline of Knowing Absolutely</u> <u>Nothing ... to Learning So Much</u> <u>About Supporting Work in Indian</u> <u>Country</u>
- <u>Funder Perspectives: Why We</u> <u>Work in Indian Country: An</u> Affinity Group's Perspective
- <u>Reclaiming Native Truth: A</u>
 <u>Project to Dispel America's Myths</u>
 <u>and Misconceptions</u>
- We Need to Change How We <u>Think: Perspectives on</u> <u>Philanthropy's Underfunding of</u> <u>Native Communities and Causes</u>

Organizations such as First Nations Development Institute and Native Americans in Philanthropy have advocated for decades for foundations to take these actions, and they have resources for foundations that want to learn more.

RESOURCES FOR WORKING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH NATIVE AMERICAN LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES (Continued)

First Nations Development Institute and Nonprofit Quarterly

- Perspectives from Philanthropy Series
 - Spoiler Alert: Narrative Change Needed to Support Indigenous-led Work
 - How to Seek, Find, and Engage Native American Staff and Board Members
 - o <u>Learning to Support Indigenous Communities: One Foundation's Experience</u>
- Philanthropy and the Native Non-Profit Sector Series
 - o Indigenous Peoples' Day: Combating the Erasure of Native People
 - o <u>People Powered: Strength-Based Indigenous Movements</u>
 - o Unpacking Capacity Building
 - <u>Linguistic and Cultural Revitalization in Indian Country: Lessons for</u> <u>Philanthropy</u>
 - o Let's Talk about Fundraising: A Perspective from Cochiti Pueblo
 - o Irrational Numbers: Charting a New Path in Indian Country
 - o <u>Celebrating Our Strengths: Authentic Partnerships for Nation Building</u>
 - o <u>Philanthropy as Reciprocity</u>
 - Building Partnerships in Indian Country through Relationships: Rules for the Road

Native Americans in Philanthropy

- <u>Generation Indigenous: Bringing Powerful Minds Together</u>
- Indigenous Community Leadership in Response to COVID-19: A Call to Action for the Philanthropic Sector
- Investing to Prevent and End All Forms of Violence Against Native Women and Girls
- The Indigenous Lifecourse: Strengthening the Health and Well-Being of Native Youth
- <u>Original Instructions: A Challenge to Philanthropy to Expand Health and Educational</u>
 <u>Opportunities for Native Youth</u>
- <u>Philanthropy Self-Assessment for Working with Tribal Communities</u>
- <u>Strong Hearts and Minds: Centering Indigenous Women and Girls in Movement</u> <u>Building</u>

RESOURCES FOR WORKING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH NATIVE AMERICAN LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES (Continued)

Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid

- Investing in Native Communities: Philanthropic Funding for Native American Communities and Causes
- Investing in Native Communities

NDN Collective

- Building Indigenous Power and Investing in Indigenous Self-Determination
- Bridging the Divide Between Impact Investing and Native America

Native Ways Federation

- Tips for Native Organizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Ways to Take Action

Methodology

Four sources of data were used for this research:

- Surveys of nonprofit leaders (See methodology here: <u>https://cep.org/portfolio/persevering-through-crisis-the-state-of-nonprofits/</u>)
- Surveys of foundation leaders (See methodology here: https://cep.org/portfolio/foundations-respond-to-crisis-lasting-change/)
- Surveys of grantee organizations from CEP's Grantee Perception Report[®] (GPR)
- Interviews with Native American and AAPI nonprofit leaders

All research and analyses were developed and executed by CEP staff. Information detailing the processes for collecting and analyzing the data associated with the latter two sources is below.

GPR DATA

Survey data discussed in this report was gathered through surveys administered as part of CEP's GPR process. It is important to note that since these data come from executive directors of nonprofits *that receive funding from foundations that have commissioned the GPR*, their experiences are not necessarily generalizable to all nonprofits, or even all nonprofits that receive fundings. However, the differences in the grantee experience that we identify in our data align with patterns we are seeing in other studies we have conducted with different samples.

Method

Foundations commission GPRs to receive confidential feedback from their grantees on a range of issues, such as:

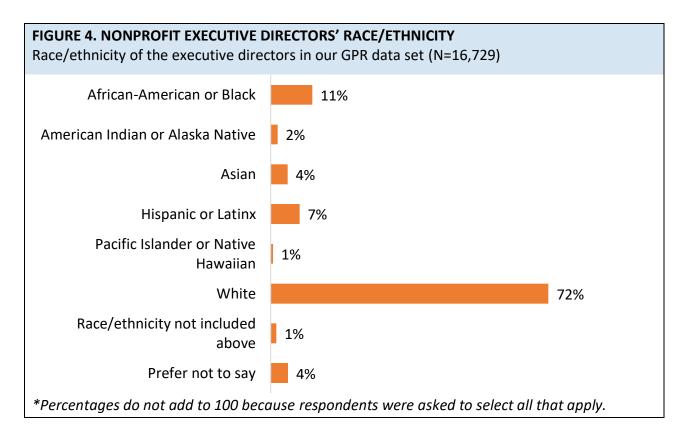
- Grant characteristics
- Foundation-grantee relationships
- Foundation understanding
- Foundation processes
- Perceptions of foundation impact

The GPR survey consists of about 50 items, many of which used seven-point Likert rating scales. All surveys are fielded online. Grantees are sent a brief email that included a description of the GPR survey, a statement of confidentiality, and a link to their survey. This email is sent to a foundation's main contact at a grantee organization. That contact could be the executive director, other senior management, the project director, the development director, among others. Our analyses focus on executive directors. For this analysis, we used two questions to describe executive directors' race/ethnicity. The first question was only asked of those who were surveyed before August 2020 and the second was only asked of those who were surveyed after that date. We were not able to include the response options of "Middle Eastern or North African" or "Multiracial or Multi-ethnic" in our analyses since these are new and we do not have enough data yet.

- 1. (Asked only of respondents in the U.S.) What is your race/ethnicity? (Please check all that apply)
 - a. African-American or Black
 - b. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - c. Asian (including the Indian subcontinent)
 - d. White
 - e. Hispanic or Latinx
 - f. Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
 - g. Race/ethnicity not included above
 - h. Prefer not to say
- 2. (Asked only of respondents in the U.S.) What is your race/ethnicity? (Please check all that apply)
 - a. African-American or Black
 - b. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - c. Asian (including the Indian subcontinent)
 - d. Hispanic or Latinx
 - e. Middle Eastern or North African
 - f. Multiracial or Multi-ethnic
 - g. Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
 - h. White
 - i. Race/ethnicity not included above
 - j. Prefer not to say

Sample

Between 2011 and May 2021, 312 foundations commissioned a GPR and 149,854 of their grantees were invited to participate in the GPR survey. Of those surveyed, 95,505 grantees responded, resulting in a response rate of 64 percent. Almost 17,000 of these grantee respondents were executive directors of nonprofits that receive funding from 259 U.S.-based foundations, and these were the respondents that were included in the analyses. The race/ethnicity of these respondents is displayed in Figure 4.



The foundations in our data set varied in type, assets, and giving (Table 1).

TABLE 1. FOUNDATION CHARACTERISTICS	
<u>Type</u>	
Community	14%
Corporate	6%
Private	63%
Public charity	6%
Other	7%
Missing data	5%
<u>Assets</u>	
Range	\$477K to \$34B
Median	\$280M
Giving	
Range	\$355K to \$3B
Median	\$17M

Quantitative Analysis

To analyze the quantitative survey data used to inform this report, a combination of t-tests, chi square analyses, and regression analyses was used. An alpha level of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance for all inferential tests conducted. Effect sizes were examined for all analyses. Patterns of small effects were reported for the first key finding in both reports. The second key finding is based on medium and large effects in both reports, unless otherwise noted in charts.

INTERVIEWS

Interview Population

To select AAPI and Native American nonprofit leaders to interview for this project, we reached out to the Long Family Foundation, the Jeremy Lin Foundation, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, and Native Americans in Philanthropy. Our contacts at these organizations suggested nonprofit leaders for us to interview.

We emailed these nonprofit leaders and invited them to participate in interviews. We offered them \$50 gift cards to bookshop.org to thank them for their time. Ultimately, 13 leaders from 11 nonprofits participated in interviews.

Sample Characteristics

Interviewees represented organizations that varied in expenses. Their annual expenses ranged from approximately \$100K to \$14.6M, with a median of \$1.4M.

Interview Protocols

After interview protocols were developed, two pilot interviews — one with an AAPI nonprofit leader and one with a Native American nonprofit leader — were conducted to test the protocols. We gave pilot interviewees \$50 gift cards to bookshop.org to thank them for their time. The interview protocols were edited based on the feedback from the pilot interviewees. Pilot interviews were excluded from the analysis.

Every interview protocol began with an introductory script describing the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the conversation. At the start of the conversation, interviewees were asked to provide permission for the interview to be recorded and transcribed.

The interview protocol consisted of up to ten questions for the interviewee(s) about nonprofit leaders' experiences with foundations.

Data Collection

In October and November 2021, 11 interviews were conducted by two CEP staff members. Interviewers discussed the interview process and worked together to establish consistency in style. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. All interviewees were promised confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were professionally transcribed. The transcripts were not coded; we simply include quotes from the interviews throughout the report that are representative of the interviews more broadly. We asked all interviewees whether they would like to be recognized in the acknowledgments section of the report.

Endnotes

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⁷ Buteau, Glickman, and Leiwant, "Relationships Matter."

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